

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 002327

SIPDIS

UNVIE FOR IAEA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/21/2009

TAGS: KNNP MNUC PGOV PHUM PREL IS ISRAEL RELATIONS GOI INTERNAL

SUBJECT: VANUNU, UPON RELEASE, CLAIMS U.S. AGENT LURED HIM
TO 1986 CAPTURE

Classified By: Pol/C Norm Olsen for Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

1. (C) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Immediately upon his April 21 release from prison, "nuclear spy" Mordechai Vanunu charged that the woman who lured him into a Mossad trap in 1986 worked for the CIA or FBI. Nevertheless, Vanunu told the press that he would like to emigrate to the U.S. The head of the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, Gideon Frank, defended the GOI's restrictions on Vanunu's liberty in an April 20 discussion with visiting U/S Bolton, charging that Vanunu is out to "destroy" the Dimona nuclear facility. In an earlier discussion with the Ambassador, however, Frank's deputy accused the head of the MOD internal security service of acting like a Communist security apparatchik in his campaign against Vanunu. Recent articles have maintained that the security establishment is motivated by a desire to conceal its own bumbling in failing to prevent the original Vanunu leaks, although an Israeli journalist speculated that Vanunu's lawyers were peddling this story. In placing onerous restrictions on Vanunu's liberty, the GOI appears to be elevating Vanunu's international cult status rather than protecting its nuclear program or national security. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

Vanunu Drags the U.S. Into It

2. (U) Mordechai Vanunu, the former low-level technician at Israel's Dimona reactor who revealed details of Israel's nuclear program to the Sunday Times of London in 1986, claimed, upon his April 21 release from 18 years in prison, that the woman who lured him into a Mossad kidnapping trap in Rome in 1986 was an agent of the CIA or FBI, not the Mossad. Nevertheless, he told Israel Radio -- in English, because he is refusing to speak Hebrew -- that he would like to emigrate to the United States, marry, and study and teach history. Leaving little doubt that he intended to remain a nuisance for the GOI, Vanunu told a crowd of supporters, opponents and journalists outside the gates of the Shikma prison in Ashkelon that he had been mistreated in prison because of his conversion to Christianity. He also called for opening Dimona to international inspections.

3. (U) Vanunu's hope to leave Israel will be blocked, at least for now, by a GOI decision to deny Vanunu a passport. Vanunu has also been barred from communicating with foreigners, entering embassies, approaching an airport or other point of international egress, or talking with anyone about his experiences at Dimona. He will not be allowed to leave the city in which he chooses to live, reportedly the Jaffa section of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, without authorization. Vanunu reportedly intends to challenge these restrictions in court.

Top Nuclear Bureaucrats Split on Handling Vanunu

4. (C) In an April 20 discussion with visiting Under Secretary John Bolton, the head of the Israel Atomic Energy

SIPDIS

Commission, Gideon Frank, defended the restrictions on Vanunu, while acknowledging that they may prove unenforceable. Frank charged that Vanunu "acted like a spy" during his last months as an employee at Dimona and that he clearly still intended to "destroy Dimona." Frank noted that Vanunu, as a low-level technician, had not had access to a lot of sensitive information about Dimona, but worried that Vanunu would simply invent and spread lies. Moreover, Frank added, not all the information that Vanunu leaked to the Times had made it into print.

5. (C) Frank's deputy, Eli Levite, expressed a very different view of the GOI restrictions on Vanunu in a March 3 conversation with the Ambassador. He said that Yehiel Horev, the head of the MOD internal security department (MALMAB), whose responsibilities include Dimona, was the driving force behind the GOI campaign to restrict Vanunu's liberty and had argued for keeping Vanunu in administrative or home detention. Noting that Horev had held the same position

since the period of the Vanunu leaks, Levite commented that Horev had come to resemble "those who held similar positions for 18 years in former Communist countries." Israel is a democracy, Levite said, and should therefore leave Vanunu alone now that he has paid his debt to society.

Security Service CYA?

16. (C) Recent articles in Ha'aretz and Yedioth Ahronoth suggested that Horev and other members of the GOI security establishment sought to restrict Vanunu in order to prevent revelation of their lapses in not stopping Vanunu before he leaked to the Times. In a discussion with emboffs, an Israeli journalist not involved in either of the reports cast doubts on this version of events. The fact that two newspapers ran the story suggested, he said, that Vanunu's lawyers had been peddling the story.

17. (C) COMMENT: The GOI is only contributing to the international cult around Vanunu in its continuing campaign against him. Vanunu's revelations in 1986 did nothing to set back Israel's nuclear program, and we have difficulty imagining that anything he says or does today could harm the program or otherwise damage Israeli national security. As Ha'aretz defense commentator Reuven Pedatzur wrote, Vanunu is "a strange man with strange ideas who committed a very serious crime for which he was tried and imprisoned for a lengthy period.... Leave Vanunu alone. Simply ignore him. Don't turn him into a cultural hero."

18. (U) U/S Bolton did not have an opportunity to clear this message.

Visit Embassy Tel Aviv's Classified Website:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/telaviv>

You can also access this site through the State Department's Classified SIPRNET website.

KURTZER